STATE OF UTAH GENERAL OUTLOOK
Feb 1, 2007

SUMMARY

It is not often that we have a January this cold and this dry, especially as far as snow accumulation is concerned. It is even less often when we write an obituary for the season at the beginning of February. We are very optimistic folks here in Utah, especially in the water supply business and we are always looking for that glimmer of hope, the Hail Mary pass to the end zone or even some sea gulls eating crickets. That is about what it will take at this point to bring Utah watersheds back to average snowpack conditions. In a nutshell: the Bear River needs 163% of average snowpack accumulation in February and March to reach average, the probability of getting that much snow is 3%. That is the optimistic version. The pessimist realizes there is a 97% probability it's not going to happen. The Weber: 163% accumulation, 0% probability, Provo: 164%, 3%, Uintah Basin: 140%, 6%, southeast Utah: 167%, 6%, Sevier 149%, 19% and southwest Utah: 163%, accumulation and a 33% probability. The natural variability in southern Utah can be amazing - if there were no snow in that region, it would still have an 11% chance of getting back to normal. So, can it happen, the answer is yes, will it happen and the answer is maybe - but. Maybe - the term itself is full of doubt, couple that with a meteorological forecast of essentially nothing for the next week or so and we only have half of February and March to make the accumulation. The coffin seems to be nailed and we are only talking about what to put on the epitaph at this point, and as noted, it is still the beginning of February. On a brighter note, when snowpacks are this low, they typically rebound to some degree. Only a few cases have continued to spiral downward like 1977 snowpacks did. While average is not likely, perhaps we might make it back to 80% if things change back to a wetter pattern. Soil moisture continues to decline slightly from last month with: Bear - 66%, Weber - 60%, Provo - 48%, Uintah Basin - 39%, southeast Utah - 49%, Sevier - 44%, southwest Utah - 31% and statewide - 48% of saturation. These values are a little higher than last year. In general, most areas of the state have excellent reservoir carryover. General water supply conditions range from below to near average. Streamflow forecasts range from 10% to 86% of average. Surface Water Supply Indices range from 23% on the Bear River, to 84% on the west side of the Uintah Basin.

SNOWPACK

February first snowpacks as measured by the NRCS SNOTEL are as follows: Bear - 62%, Weber - 60%, Provo - 57%, Uintahs - 74%, southeast Utah - 55%, Sevier - 67%, southwest Utah - 65% and the statewide figure is 64% of average. South facing aspects have melted off to surprisingly high elevations, in some places to the 10,000 ft range. Utah needs between 140% and 167% of normal snowpack accumulation in February and March to reach average conditions. The probability of getting this accumulation ranges between 0 and 33% with most areas at 6% or less. Although there are still several months of potential accumulation left in this season, we are not likely to see a return to average conditions this year.

PRECIPITATION

Mountain precipitation during January was much below normal at 40% of average statewide. Precipitation ranged from 34% on the Bear to 50% on the Uintah Basin. This brings the seasonal accumulation (Oct-Jan) to 86% of average statewide and ranges from 77% on the Bear to 99% over southeastern Utah.

RESERVOIRS

Storage in 41 of Utah's key irrigation reservoirs is at 68% of capacity. This is an increase of 1% from last year. Reservoirs across the State have been making steady gains in storage. Bear Lake really is the last reservoir to remain in an extremely low condition due to the prolonged drought.

STREAMFLOW

Snowmelt streamflows are expected to have a wide range from much below average to near average across the state of Utah this year. Forecast streamflows range from 10% on North Creek nr Monticello to 86% of average for Big Brush Creek nr Red Fleet Reservoir. Most flows are forecast to be in the 50% to 70% range.